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SUBJ: NOMINATION FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S AWARD FOR
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE

REF: STATE 111471

11. (U) The following is Embassy Harare's nomination for the
Secretary of State's Award for International Women of Courage.

NAME: Jestina Mungarewa Mukoko
TITLE: National Director
INSTITUTION: Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP)
DOB: 22-MAR-1967
POB: Zimbabwe
Citizenship: Zimbabwean
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12. Since 2007, Ms. Mukoko has served as the Executive Director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP), an NGO made up of approximately 400 brave Zimbabweans who monitor human rights abuses throughout Zimbabwe. ZPP's reports have helped provide the international community with accurate assessments of human rights abuses, including violence against women and politically-slanted distribution of food, in communities across Zimbabwe, particularly during the violent 2008 election period. Even before joining ZPP, Ms. Mukoko was a well-known leader in the human rights and activist communities in Zimbabwe through her work with other NGOs after a successful career as a journalist. Ms. Mukoko first made a name for herself as a broadcaster for Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation where she delivered the news to Zimbabweans in English, Shona, and Ndebele. She was a pioneering role model for professional women in journalism, which had traditionally been dominated by men. Her many years as a radio and television journalist introduced her as a friendly and familiar face to Zimbabweans in every corner of the country. After leaving television and radio, Ms. Mukoko moved to civil society where she has used her journalism and publicity skills to further promote civic education and human rights.

13. After years of documenting and speaking out on human rights, Ms. Mukoko herself became a victim of a state-sponsored attack last year. An active figure in Zimbabwe's civil society, she was abducted by state security agents from her home on December 3, just hours after giving a speech to a civil society group calling on Zimbabweans to take action during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. During her abduction, she was tortured by agents who beat her, subjected her to falanga (beating on the soles of the feet), and forced her to confess to an alleged plot to mount a terrorist incursion from neighboring Botswana. Ms. Mukoko appeared in a Zimbabwean police station suddenly on December 23, and was subsequently held at the notorious Chikurubi Maximum Security prison until a court finally granted her bail on February 27.

14. Throughout her incarceration at Chikurubi, and despite several court orders calling on officials to allow her to be treated at a private medical facility, she was repeatedly denied adequate medical care for injuries and medical conditions that went untreated during her detention. After she appealed through the courts, the Zimbabwean Supreme Court finally ruled on September 28 that state

security forces had violated her human rights to such an extent as to warrant a permanent stay of prosecution in the case against her. Although she has secured this significant legal victory, Ms. Mukoko is continuing her fight against the security agents who abducted and tortured her by suing them in Zimbabwe's courts for over US\$1 million. Regime violence and intimidation has often silenced its opponents. Ms. Mukoko's ongoing legal case is an important statement against violence and oppression. Her bravery in calling those responsible for her abduction and torture to account, as well as her continuing role as head of ZPP has only reinforced her position as a leading human rights defender in one of the most oppressive countries in the world.

¶5. In the election-related violence that blanketed Zimbabwe in mid-2008, women often suffered particularly harsh abuse at the hands of security agents and ZANU-PF youths. Ms. Mukoko's abduction and subsequent court case brought the subject of politically-motivated violence -- particularly violence against women -- and human rights abuses home to all Zimbabweans. Across the country, people in villages discussed "what happened to Jestina" and debated on whether the government, even if it had a legitimate case against her, was justified in abducting her in such a violent fashion.

¶6. Despite the horrors she has endured, Ms. Mukoko continues to serve as ZPP's Executive Director and as a role model for Zimbabweans. Zimbabwean security forces returned her passport to her on September 30, and she has already traveled overseas to continue her work crusading for human rights in Zimbabwe. Although Ms. Mukoko has always been an easily recognized figure since her days as a TV newswoman, her abduction has further raised her profile and the sensitive issue of women as victims of political violence. Her actions and story already inspire women, young and old, in Zimbabwe to courageously pick up the pieces of their shattered lives, to fight human rights abusers in the courts, and to speak the truth -- however painful it might be. Since winning her case in the Supreme Court, Ms. Mukoko has spoken openly of the counseling she and her family have received and how it has helped them. Already, other victims are coming forward to request counseling as they seek to follow Ms. Mukoko's example.

¶7. Before her abduction, Ms. Mukoko was already widely respected as a courageous woman thanks to her important work at ZPP in documenting human rights abuses. Ms. Mukoko's tragic ordeal and her brave response give even greater strength to her nomination. Conferring her with the International Woman of Courage Award would further encourage other Zimbabwean women who bear the scars of political violence and fighting the male-dominated professional establishment to follow her lead in defending human rights in word and deed. It would also encourage survivors of violence and repression to seek the important emotional support that can help them move forward.

¶8. Ms. Mukoko was informed of Post's submission of this nomination.

¶9. Embassy Officers working on women's issues:

NAME: Ms. Amanda Porter (POL Section), U.S. Embassy Harare, TEL: 263-4-250593/4

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